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ABSTRACT

This publication is concerned with how to keep schools safe. The spring 2000 issue "Zero Tolerance: Effective Policy or Display of Administrative Machismo?" (James W. Fiscus) discusses how difficult it is to determine just what zero tolerance means and reminds readers that schools were required to pass zero tolerance rules to remain eligible for funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Other articles in the newsletter are "Check Your Free Resources First" (Michael S. Dorn; Karen Franklin; Sonayia Shepherd) and a guest column, "Student Voices: We Must Be Partners" (Jennifer McKay). The summer 2000 issue "Fighting Hate Speech" (James W. Fiscus) discusses hate crime statistics and current trends in hate groups. Other articles include a guest column, "Youth Summits Give Students a Voice" (Nisan Chavkin) and a student column, "Student Voices: Helpful Insults" (Zack Moore). The fall 2000 issue "New Reports Help Schools Assess Threats" (Ira Pollack) discusses two reports, one by the FBI and one a collaboration by the Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education, which offer help for schools in assessing threats. Other articles include a guest column, "When Death Affects Your School" (Scott Poland) and "Positive Discipline Changes School Climate." Each issue also contains a list of nonprofit and governmental school safety resources, a news and announcements section, and a calendar of events. (BT)

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Fiscus, James W., Ed.
Pollack, Ira, Ed.

Northwest Regional Educational Lab, OR.

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THE Safety Zone

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 1 | SPRING 2000

ZERO TOLERANCE: EFFECTIVE POLICY OR DISPLAY OF ADMINISTRATIVE MACHISMO?

By JAMES W. FISCUS

Zero tolerance policies aimed at keeping weapons out of schools have spread across the nation like fog on a winter morning. Trying to determine exactly what zero tolerance means, whether such policies are fairly enforced, and if zero tolerance policies have reduced violence in our schools is rather like staring into that winter fog bank.

Zero tolerance policies first came to wide public attention in 1986 when the U.S. attorney in San Diego used the slogan to explain his seizure of boats found with even small amounts of drugs. In 1988, U.S. Attorney General Ed Meese authorized customs agents to seize vehicles and passports of anyone crossing the U.S. border with trace amounts of drugs.[1]

In the latter part of the 1980s and into the early 1990s, schools across the began enacting zero tolerance policies against drugs, weapons, use of tobacco, and school disruption. Federal law further advanced zero tolerance polices in schools when President Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act (GFSA) in 1994. The 1994 act requires expulsion for one calendar year of any student bringing a weapon to school, though local regulations must allow for a case-by-case modification of the one-year expulsion by the "chief administrative officer" of the school district. The act also requires referral of the student to the justice system.

The act's definition of weapons includes guns, bombs, grenades, rockets, and missiles. However, it allows states to broaden their definitions, and many jurisdictions include knives and other "weapons" within their zero tolerance policies. Pennsylvania's school code (see photo) defines a weapon "as any knife, cutting instrument, cutting tool, nunchaku, firearm, shotgun and any other tool, instrument, or implement capable of inflicting serious bodily injury," according to the *York Dispatch*.

School districts were required to pass zero tolerance rules to remain eligible for funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). By 1997, 90 percent of the nation's schools had zero tolerance policies for firearms.[2]

Please see Zero Tolerance, Page 2

FIRST-GRADER TIMIERE CROSBY RESTS HIS HEAD ON HIS MOTHER, LENNIECE, DURING AN EXPULSION HEARING TO DETERMINE WHETHER THE BOY VIOLATED THE YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, SCHOOL DISTRICT'S ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY ON WEAPONS POSSESSIONS IN SCHOOLS BY POSSESSING A NAIL CLIPPER CONTAINING A TWO-INCH BLADE. YORK CITY SCHOOL BOARD REDUCED THE BOY'S INITIAL FOUR-WEEK EXPULSION TO 10 DAYS. AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO

CREATING SAFE SCHOOLS

3 Free Resources

5 Student Voices

6 News and Announcements

8 Calendar

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ZERO TOLERANCE: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Defining Zero Tolerance

Interestingly, the 1994 act does not use the term "zero tolerance," and thus does not define the concept, making it more a term of public relations than of law. In March 1998, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) issued a statistical analysis, "Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97," that reported on "zero tolerance" policies. Kathryn Chandler, Program Director of the NCES Interagency and Household Studies Program, said that the 1998 document was a one-time report, but that her office has prepared a new survey that is expected to be repeated every two years.

The new survey defines zero tolerance as any policy that provides a "known consequence" if a given act is committed—bringing a gun to school, for example—regardless of the severity of the consequence. A "known consequence" specifying a minor punishment would be as much "zero tolerance" as long-term suspension from the school.

Chandler added that even before the Gun-Free Schools Act, schools often used the term "expulsion" to mean different things. With the mandatory expulsions under the act, there has been a trend to reduce the severity of consequences defined as expulsion, she said, allowing schools to meet the requirements of the federal law while moderating the actions taken against students. As a result, the new questionnaire uses the phrase "removal from school with no continuing educational services for at least one year" when asking about school policies.

The traditional understanding of zero tolerance policies remains generally accurate, however, in that they tend to treat "both minor and major incidents with equal severity in order to 'send a message' to potential violators."[1]

WITH THE MANDATORY EXPULSIONS UNDER THE ACT, THERE HAS BEEN A TREND TO REDUCE THE SEVERITY OF CONSEQUENCES DEFINED AS EXPULSION ... ALLOWING SCHOOLS TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FEDERAL LAW WHILE MODERATING THE ACTIONS TAKEN AGAINST STUDENTS.

Equity

Two questions of equity are frequently asked about zero tolerance polices: Are they applied equally and fairly to all students in a school or district, or are harsher penalties applied to minority and poor students? And should they be applied as absolute law, or should administrators use their review authority to temper them with mercy—or at least with an understanding that situations change from child to child?

Studies of zero tolerance policies show that they are often applied more vigorously against minority students. A review of data on suspensions from the U.S. Office for Civil Rights found that "more than two-thirds" of the 3,000 districts studied showed higher rates for expulsion of black students than for white students. The higher expulsion rates do not appear to be related to either the higher poverty level among African Americans or to a higher level of disruptive behavior by black students.[1]

Flexibility and Pressure

School administrators clearly feel contradictory pressures over enforcement of zero tolerance policies. W. Michael Martin, Supervisor of the Office of Elementary Education for the Loudoun County (Virginia) Public Schools, wrote in the *American School Board Journal* that administrators are damned if they "zealously enforce zero tolerance" and damned if they are "seen as too lax or too tolerant of weapons violations" in their schools.[3]

As administrators try to balance the rights of individual students against the rights of the entire student body to be safe, Martin said, "some school boards and superintendents are beginning to look for a middle ground between 'automatic' expulsions for weapons violations and 'laissez-faire' messages resulting in inconsistent enforcement."[3]

Zero tolerance policies that are inflexibly administered may deliver an unintended message to students and undercut respect for such policies, according to Nisan Chavkin, Associate Director of the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC), and the Youth for Justice representative on the NRCSS Advisory Committee. (Chavkin said he was not speaking for the two organizations.)

"In law-related education (LRE), we teach kids about public policy. After participating in LRE lessons on school weapons policies, students of all ages invariably come to the conclusion that crafting these kinds of policies is very difficult, that these policies must allow for reasonable exceptions," Chavkin said. "The example of mandatory minimum penalties in the federal criminal justice system's sentencing guideline is instructive. Passed originally at the urging of reformers to curb arbitrary and even capricious sentencing practices, one result of this policy has been the loss by judges of their ability to make reasoned and nuanced judgments."

Effectiveness

Have zero tolerance policies lowered the level of school violence or reduced the presence of drugs at schools?

While the U.S. Department of Education has reported an increase in the total number of expulsions—in some states, expulsions have doubled since enactment of zero tolerance policies—it has also reported that expulsions for "firearms" violations have dropped nearly in half, from 6,093 in 1996-97 to 3,930 in 1997-98.[4] At first glance, that drop appears to strongly support zero tolerance policies. The issue is not that clear-cut, however.

Firearms expulsion numbers appear particularly difficult to compare at this point. Paul M. Kingery, Director of the Hamilton Fish Institute, notes that some states included numbers for firearms and other weapons as a single category

Please see Zero Tolerance, Page 7

CHECK YOUR FREE RESOURCES FIRST

By MICHAEL S. DORN, KAREN FRANKLIN, AND SONAYIA SHEPHERD

We still shake our heads in disbelief at a recurring situation: School officials tell us that they have spent major portions of their annual school safety budget for consultant services. By simply making a toll-free call to our State School Safety Coordinator, these Georgia officials could have obtained training and technical assistance coordinated and funded by the state. They would also have had assurance that the work had been conducted in accordance with state law by individuals who have the backing of state government.

The concern in our nation following the major acts of weapons violence in American schools in recent years has caused school administrators to look for ways to improve school safety. There is a positive side to this national soul searching as fewer students and educators are facing death and injury due to long overdue improvements in school safety.

While vast resources are available in the public and private sector to improve the level of safety in our schools, there have been many instances of schools using their limited funds to improve school safety when resources of high quality were available to them at no cost. School administrators should review available free resources before turning to the private sector to improve school safety.

Private sector resources often offer high-quality options to improve school safety. We have been fortunate to have crossed paths with innovative individuals who work diligently in the private sector for the safety of our school children. However, these leaders in the field of school safety are only one source of information. Some of the best information available comes from government and not-for-profit agencies. These sources also offer an advantage to schools because they are not trying to sell additional services to their clients. Instead, they are fulfilling the services that they are funded to provide.

Communities should make an independent assessment of the credentials and costs of the resources they are considering. School administrators should consider the expertise available to them at the local, state, and federal levels through the numerous government agencies that provide these services as part of their mission. The mandate to provide services is particularly true for those public safety agencies that would be the ones to respond to any emergency at the school.

A school crisis is not the time and place for school officials to meet their public safety counterparts *for the first time* to discuss the management of a disaster situation. The crisis planning phase should occur *before an incident occurs* and is an ideal time for school officials to begin developing working relationships with representatives of the various public safety agencies. It is no more appropriate for a school administrator to prepare a crisis plan unaided than it would be for the local police chief to develop the math curriculum. By working together, school officials and public safety professionals can not only develop practical school safety and crisis plans, but they can also develop the type of effective working relationships that can mean the difference between life and death in handling a major crisis.

As an example of a resource that is available in our state, public and private schools in Georgia can receive a wide range of free services relating to the improvement of school safety through the Georgia Emergency Management Agency—Office of the Governor (GEMA). GEMA has 10 full-time school safety personnel who provide training, technical assistance, research services, and resource materials relating to the prevention of, planning for, response to, and recovery from school crisis situations. GEMA staff teach eight field programs relating to school safety, coordinate site surveys of school facilities, facilitate mock crisis exercises, handle requests for technical assistance, and respond in a supporting role when a school crisis occurs. All services provided by the unit are in compliance with Georgia Senate Bill 74, which establishes specific requirements for school safety in Georgia public schools. GEMA is just one of the agencies in the state that can provide free assistance of high quality to schools.

Georgia's political leadership has taken the stance that by providing cutting-edge and consistent training and technical assistance, we can keep our school safety funds where they should be—in local communities. This approach affords communities the opportunity to address their local needs when it comes to school safety equipment, personnel, and programs.

For those who are willing to invest some time and effort, there are more free school safety information resources available to school districts than most have the time to utilize. See Page 4.

While developing a strategy to improve the level of safety in your schools and increase the level of preparedness for crisis situations, it is important to review all potentially helpful resources. Before precious tax dollars are committed to paying a consultant to provide school safety expertise, take the time to ensure that the assistance you need has not already been bought and paid for by your tax dollars and donations to not-for-profit organizations.

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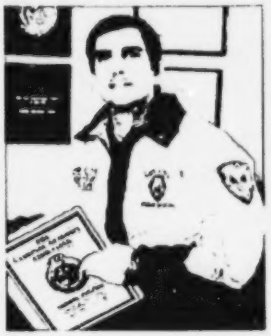
Michael S. Dorn is a School Safety Specialist with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency—Office of the Governor (GEMA). Karen Franklin is State School Safety Coordinator, and Sonayia Shepherd is Area 7 School Safety Coordinator, both also with GEMA. They can be reached at (404) 635-7000.



MICHAEL S. DORN

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NONPROFIT AND GOVERNMENTAL SCHOOL SAFETY RESOURCES

The following is a partial list of potential school safety resources. This list is designed for school officials who want to improve the level of safety in their schools while staying within their budgets.

LOCAL AGENCIES

- **Emergency management agencies**—May be able to help facilitate site surveys of school facilities, assist with the development of school crisis plans, help coordinate mock crisis exercises, and may serve as a valuable liaison with public safety responders in your area.
- **Fire service**—May be able to survey facilities to identify fire and evacuation hazards, safe evacuation routes, evacuation sites, and conduct training for school staff on issues involving hazardous materials.
- **Law enforcement**—May be able to provide training relating to gangs, illegal drugs, weapons recognition, workplace violence, and other topics. They may be able to offer assistance with crime prevention including surveys of school facilities.
- **American Red Cross**—May be able to help with staff training, response to school crisis situations, planning and staffing assistance for family reunification centers after a crisis, and a variety of youth programs.

STATE AGENCIES

- **State departments of education**—May be able to provide training materials, videos, and technical assistance for violence prevention, safe school planning, and school crisis response planning.
- **State emergency management agencies**—May be able to provide staff training, information pertaining to crisis planning, planning guides, and technical support assistance developing crisis plans and mock crisis exercises. For example, the Georgia Emergency Management Agency has general school safety information available on its Web site: www.state.ga.us/GEMA. The agency also provides a secure public safety Web site that contains sensitive school safety information that cannot be posted on a general-access Web site. The service is available at no cost to public safety agencies. Public safety officials can apply at safetynet.gema.state.ga.us.
- **State law enforcement agencies**—May be able to provide training relating to bombs and bomb threats, gangs, weapons, and other topics, and offer assistance in crisis planning.
- **State human resources agencies**—May be able to provide training and technical assistance pertaining to crisis mental health issues.
- **State school safety centers**—Many states have school safety centers, sometimes based at a university, that may be able to help. For a list of state centers, go to the National Resource Center for Safe Schools Web site: www.safetyzone.org and click on "Links to Other Sites" and then on "State and Community Sites".

FEDERAL AGENCIES

- **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms** (ATF—sometimes BATF)—ATF is the lead federal law enforcement agency in matters pertaining to the possession and use of unlawful explosive devices and employs leading experts in this field. The ATF office for your region may be able to offer training or other assistance in issues relating to bomb and bomb threats. The ATF also coordinates the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.) for students, working in cooperation with local law enforcement agencies. Contact G.R.E.A.T. by calling 1-800-726-7070 or (202) 927-2160 in Washington, D.C. The Web site: www.atf.treas.gov/great/index.htm. The main ATF Web address: www.atf.treas.gov. List of ATF field offices and phone numbers—some local offices are listed under the main heading for their regional office. Web: www.atf.treas.gov/contact/field.htm. The ATF will send schools a booklet on dealing with bomb threats that includes a Bomb Threat Checklist. To obtain a copy, call your local ATF field office or: ATF Arson & Explosives Division, Washington, D.C. Phone: (202) 927-7930. Explosives/Bomb Incidents: 1-800-ATF-BOMB. Arson Contact: 1-800-ATF-FIRE.
- **National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)**—The NCJRS can provide a variety of printed resources concerning trends in youth violence, information regarding school safety, and statistical analysis. Phone 1-800-851-3420 or (301)519-5500. Web site: www.ncjrs.org.
- **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**—Offers a wide range of services and literature pertaining to youth violence and school safety. Phone: (202) 307-9511. Web site: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org.
- **United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)**—Offers a considerable amount of useful resource material through its Web site: ed.gov/offices/OSERS. Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN. The main Web site is: www.ed.gov.
- **United States Postal Service Inspection Service**—Offers training and technical assistance in the areas of mail bomb incident prevention. Call 1-800-654-8896 to inquire about training and literature.

NRCSS LINKS

- **National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS)**—The Center's Web site (www.safetyzone.org) contains extensive resources, including links to other nonprofit organizations and a list of state school safety centers.

STUDENT VOICES: WE MUST BE PARTNERS

GUEST COLUMN

By JENNIFER MCKAY

Everyone knows that violence in schools is a serious problem that is facing schools all across the country. Some schools are even trying to take action to prevent violence. But what happens when these schools do so without the help of the students? From experience, I can tell you that things will get worse.

As an average high school student with friends in all different "cliques," I have been able talk to a wide variety of students in my school about their feelings on school violence. The most common response given to me was, "I never felt unsafe in this school until the administration started to change things." The changes include the carrying of two-way radios by the faculty, the patrol of police officers in the cafeteria, taking away of backpacks and use of lockers, and talk of installing metal detectors. All of these changes were carried out without the knowledge or consent of the students.

What happened as a result? The students of the school, including myself, resented the changes and disregarded the new rules. Tempers were high among the student body because they felt that they had no representation. They felt as though they were being reprimanded for events that had not taken place. Because of the rise in temper in the students, fights between them became more frequent, and students were getting suspended every day. One student, just this past week, was arrested for carrying an air rifle into school. It was very disheartening to see a student who had never really had any violent acts carried away in handcuffs just because he wanted to spite the rules of the new school administration.

Even after such events, the administration refused to listen to the voice of the students, and things have not yet changed for the better. When speaking with administrators from other high schools, I learned of schools with students on the school board, which seemed the perfect first step for our school. Maybe, I thought, if the students knew that there was someone on their side at these meetings, the situation at our school would improve. I decided that I was going to talk to our school principal about this. I discussed my idea with him, and explained the reason for needing a student on the school board. I also explained that the student he chose would have to be well respected by his or her peers, and would also have to appeal to a wide variety of students in the school. We are now in the process of deciding, along with the student body, who that student should be.

Another problem at school is with peer mediation. Peer mediation is a wonderful tool to have in school when it works, but in many cases it is not taken seriously. In our school, the students chosen as peer mediators do not hold the respect of the majority of students, and are not properly trained in the art of mediation. It is a serious time when a student is willing to go to his or her peers and discuss a problem, and the situation should be looked at in a serious manner.

There is a student in my school who has always been harassed by others. About five months ago, he decided to look to peer mediation for help. He, and a particular boy who harassed him more than anyone else, took time out of a class period to go. There, the victim openly admitted that he was gay. Three days later, the boy had more than 100 death threats in his locker. Why? Because the students involved in peer mediation did not feel the need to keep his secret. For peer mediation to work, all the students involved must keep everything they hear confidential. That was not done in our school, and today, the boy has been taken out of school and sent for psychiatric evaluation.

Students in my school are highly involved in the fight against school violence. We recently held a concert that I organized entitled, Sing Your Peace: Take a Stand Against Youth Violence. This was an event involving eight bands from all over the state. It gave students a chance to be in charge for the evening, and prove to their administrators that we do not want violence in our school. A student who attended the concert told me, "This was the best night that our school has ever seen. I hope now that the administrators realize that we are good kids who don't want violence in our school. If they would just give us a chance, and stop changing everything without telling us, then our school would be fine!"

It is important to take active steps to prevent school violence. But, when doing so, take into consideration the reaction of the students. I don't think that enough people realize that students want to help. We don't like waking up everyday wondering if we are going to be killed at school. We are the ones who are going to ultimately bring violence to an end.

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Jennifer McKay is a high school junior. She plans to attend college in the Washington, D.C., area, majoring in pre-law or political science.

JENNIFER MCKAY (LEFT) AND FELLOW STUDENT LISA SABADINI (RIGHT) AT A "BATTLE OF THE BANDS" CONCERT THEY ORGANIZED. THE CONCERT, SING YOUR PEACE: TAKE A STAND AGAINST YOUTH VIOLENCE, WAS ATTENDED BY SOME 400 PEOPLE. EIGHT LOCAL BANDS DONATED THEIR TIME TO THE EVENT, WHICH GROSSED ABOUT $3,000 FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORTS

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NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Legislative Forecast, Anticipated Congressional Action

The fall elections loom over the second session of the 106th Congress, and both houses will adjourn early for the campaign season. Between the short session and the inevitable election-year rise in political temperatures, Congress will be hard-pressed to complete work on the 13 Fiscal Year 2001 appropriations bills while addressing both new and pending legislation.

Several education and juvenile justice matters will be debated. Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) will likely see continuation of the effort to fund smaller classes and efforts to convert class-size funds into block grants that could be used for other purposes.

In the field of zero tolerance for guns, proposals include increasing from 45 days to one year the time that schools may remove students with disabilities who bring guns to schools. The proposals would also allow schools to deny academic and social services to the students during their suspensions.

Report Finds Higher Rural Than Urban Student Drug, Drinking, and Smoking Rates

Middle and high school students living in rural areas have higher rates of drug use, drinking, and smoking than do their urban counterparts, according to a white paper from Columbia University's National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA). The paper was commissioned by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and released at their annual meeting held the end of January in Washington, D.C.

The study found that "eighth-graders living in rural America are 104 percent likelier to use amphetamines, including methamphetamine, than those in urban areas, and 50 percent likelier to use cocaine." They are also 34 percent likelier to smoke marijuana, 83 percent likelier to use crack cocaine, 29 percent likelier to drink alcohol, and 70 percent likelier to have been drunk more than twice. For 12th-graders, the rate of use in rural America exceeds the rate in large urban areas for cocaine, crack, amphetamines, inhalants, alcohol, cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco. (Adult drug use, however, is about equal across communities of all sizes.)

A press release on the white paper is available on the Web at: www.casacolumbia.org/newsletter145/newsletter_show.htm?doc_id=23562. Retrieved from the Web, January 28, 2000.

Oregon Janitor Sues To Keep His Gun at School

Many states have laws under which local or state officials may issue permits to carry a concealed weapon. Depending upon the wording of specific concealed weapons laws, they might have an impact on a school district's ability to ban weapons from schools.

An elementary school janitor fired last September in Oregon for bringing a loaded pistol to school is suing the North Clackamas School District, claiming that only the state can regulate possession of handguns. (Clackamas is located in the suburbs south of Portland.) The former janitor, Greg S. King, has a permit allowing him to carry a concealed weapon.

In Oregon, county sheriffs may issue concealed-weapon permits to adults who have passed a background check, taken a gun-safety course, and paid the required fee. Oregon law does ban possession of firearms in public buildings, including schools. The state's concealed-weapons law, however, excludes adults with permits from that ban.

Before school on September 14, 1999, a school employee found a locked backpack in an elevator. Police found a loaded 10mm Glock pistol, ammunition, knives, and survival gear. King later said that the weapons had been returned to him by a friend who had gone hunting.

Jim Green, an attorney for the Oregon School Boards Association, told *The Oregonian* that the case will "set the tone for what districts can do to protect their buildings, their students and their staff." The case will likely take months or even years to resolve in court.

Extracted from reports in The Oregonian, *December 16, 1999, Section B, Page 1.*

Member of Columbine Task Force Calls for Police Use of Student Mental-Health Information

John Peper, a member of Colorado Governor Bill Owens' Columbine task force, said that law enforcement agencies should be given information about students obtained by mental-health counselors. Peper hopes that the counseling information will help prevent school violence. The *Denver Post* quoted Peper as saying that "para-professionals" and "professionals" should not be covered by confidentiality rules, and that the Constitution does not contain a right to privacy that would protect students. Peper is former superintendent of Jefferson County Schools. The head of the Mental Health Association of Colorado, Renee Rivera, told the paper that therapists are already bound by a "duty to warn" of potential violence.

Source: Denver Post, *January 13, 2000. Retrieved from the Web, January 14, 2000, at www.denverpost.com/news/shot0113c.htm.*

Change of Address

New address for National Center for Conflict Resolution Education: National Center for Conflict Resolution Education, Illinois State Bar Center, 424 South Second Street, Springfield, IL 62701. Phone: (217) 523-7056 or toll-free: 1-800-308-9419. Fax: (217) 523-7066. Web site: www.nccre.org. For further information, e-mail Richard Bodine: bodine@nccre.org.

NRCSS COSPONSORS MISSISSIPPI DELTA SCHOOL SAFETY CONFERENCE

Eight members of the NRCSS staff attended a two-and-a-half-day conference on school safety in support of the Mississippi Delta Initiative in Jonesboro, Arkansas, March 9 and 10. Approximately 125 school and community leaders from the Delta region attended.

The conference was cosponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and NRCSS and hosted by Arkansas State University (ASU) and ASU President, Dr. Leslie Wyatt. ASU Dean of Education, Dr. John Beineke, helped coordinate the sessions. The plenary speaker at the conference was William Modzeleski, Director of the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program.

The conference provided technical assistance and training for school districts on topics that concentrated on comprehensive safe school planning while providing information on how to assess needs and how to create and implement a safe schools plan. The Jonesboro Safe Schools/Healthy Students Model Program was showcased.

In addition to NRCSS staff, session presenters included representatives from the South Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee Departments of Education; Missouri Center for Safe Schools; Jefferson County, Kentucky, Public Schools; the Hamilton Fish Institute; the Jonesboro, (Arkansas), Public Schools and the Jonesboro Police Department; and from Arkansas State University. Staff from the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program of the U.S. Department of Education also participated.

The workshop was part of President Clinton's New Markets Program. The Interagency Mississippi Delta Taskforce, chaired by U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater, is organizing the initiative. The Delta region includes parts of seven states bordering the Lower Mississippi.

ZERO TOLERANCE: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

in their 1996-97 numbers, but by their 1997-98 reports had broken the figures into separate categories for firearms and for other weapons. (Kingery is completing an extensive analysis of suspensions and expulsion, with special attention to zero tolerance policies.)

Thus, 1996-97 and 1997-98 reports cannot be accurately compared to show a reduction in expulsions related to firearms, as a number of observers have done. No malice should be inferred from the reports or the initial conclusions drawn from them, however. As Kathryn Chandler of NCES said, any time statisticians begin collecting new data it takes several surveys to be sure they are asking the right questions to obtain information that can be compared over time.

There is evidence that fewer students are carrying weapons to school. *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1999* (Table 11.1) reports that the percentage of students in grades nine through 12 carrying a weapon to school in the previous 30 days has declined. In 1993, 11.8 percent reported bringing a weapon to school; in 1995, 9.8 percent did; while by 1997, the number was down to 8.5 percent.[5]

However, "Very few students who carry firearms to school are ever caught," Kingery warns. Kingery compared the rate with which students are considered for expulsion for carrying a gun to school (from Gun-Free Schools Act reports) with the number of students who said they had carried firearms to school (from the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey). "Less than one percent of high school students who carried a firearm to school were actually caught and considered for expulsion in 1997," Kingery said. "Clearly zero tolerance is not significantly reducing the numbers of youth who carry firearms to school, since only one percent of carriers are even being caught," Kingery said. "The odds are that a weapon-carrier will not be caught, so the deterrence is minimal."

To ask again, have zero tolerance policies lowered the level of school violence or reduced the presence of drugs at schools? The data available do not allow us to say with any confidence that they have reduced violence levels, though they may—along with other factors—have helped reduce the number of weapons in schools. A further answer must wait on information yet to come.

Notes:

1. Skiba, Russ and Reece Peterson. (January 1999) The Dark Side of Zero Tolerance: Can Punishment Lead to Safe Schools?. *Phi Delta Kappan*, v. 80, i. 5, p. 372-76, 381-82.

2. U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (1997). *Principal/School Disciplinarian Survey on School Violence*. Fast Response Survey System. FRSS 63. Washington, DC.

3. Martin, W. Michael. (March 2000). Does Zero Mean Zero?: Balancing policy with procedure in the fight against weapons at school. *American School Board Journal*. Retrieved from the Web. March 1, 2000 www.asbj.com/security/contents/0300martin.html

4. The data were reported in the department's two reports on State Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act, for the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years.

5. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement and U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. (September 1999.) *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 1999*. (The report is available on the NRCSS Web page at www.safetyzone.org/pdf/1999057.pdf.)

CALENDAR

May 4–6

Third-Annual Symposium on School and Community Violence, Hamilton Fish Institute, George Washington University, Washington, D.C. Institute staff and members of the Institute's Consortium research teams will present findings on predicting and preventing youth violence. Registration limited to first 170 people. Contact: Nancy Budd, (703) 527-4217, extension 117. Web: www.hamfish.org

May 10–12

Finding Better Ways 2000: Keeping Everyone Safe, The Adams Mark Hotel, Philadelphia, PA. Contact: Child Welfare League of America, 440 First Street, NW, Third Floor, Washington, DC 20001-2085. Phone: (202) 942-0289. E-mail: register@cwla.org. Web: www.cwla.org/ads/conf/conf.htm#CONF08OJJDP

June 2–3

Violence and Substance Use Prevention and Intervention: Bridging Schools, Community Health Care, and the Latino Family, University of North Texas, Denton, TX. Center for Cross-Cultural Pediatric Behavioral Health, Debra Tucker, Program Manager, Center for Continuing Education and Conference Management, University of North Texas, P.O. Box 310560, Denton, TX 76203-0560. Phone: (940) 565-3481. E-mail: dtucker@scs.cmm.unt.edu. Web: www.unt.edu/pediatric/conference.htm

June 26–27

SE Regional Training by NRCSS, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC. For school, law enforcement, and juvenile justice personnel from Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North and South Carolina, and Virginia. Contact NRCSS: 1-800-248-2275.

July 29–30

State School Safety Center Consortium, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC. NRCSS sponsors the second meeting of state school safety centers. Open to state school safety centers and organizations that are the primary providers of training and technical assistance on school safety in their states. Contact NRCSS: 1-800-268-2275

July 16–21

National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) Conference, Scottsdale Radisson Resort, Scottsdale, AZ. Contact NASRO: 1-888-316-2776. Web: www.nasro.org

The Safety Zone

Executive Director, NWREL:

NRCSS Director:

Editor:

Design:

Production:

101 S.W. Main, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

1-800-268-2275
(503) 275-0131
Fax (503) 275-0444

E-mail: safeschools@nwrel.org
Web: www.safetyzone.org

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NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main, Suite 500
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THE Safety Zone

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 2 | SUMMER 2000

FIGHTING HATE SPEECH

By JAMES W. FISCUS

DEMONSTRATORS GIVE THE NAZI SALUTE AT A 1996 KU KLUX KLAN RALLY IN INDIANAPOLIS. ASSOCIATED PRESS WIRE WORLD PHOTO

CREATING SAFE SCHOOLS

3 Youth Summits

5 Student Voices

6 News and Announcements

8 Calendar

OPERATED BY:

NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

FUNDED BY:

SAFE AND DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS PROGRAM
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OJJDP

OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Crimes motivated by hatred of racial, religious, or other groups attack the structure of society and our sense of community in a way that crimes against individuals do not. But hate crimes do not happen unless hate is nurtured and taught to children who grow to be the next generation of hate mongers. Schools and parents must fight hate speech and hate propaganda if our society is to break the cycle of hate and xenophobia.

"We believe that hate is in part learned behavior, as is violence, and it can be reduced," said Karen McLaughlin, Director of the National Center for Hate Crimes Prevention. Hate hurts individuals and creates "fear in the classroom and the school system that can be destructive to any learning."

Hate Crime Statistics

A hate crime or bias-motivated crime–and by extension, hate or extremist speech—is "motivated by hatred against a victim based on his or her race, religion, sexual orientation, handicap, ethnicity, or national origins."[1]

Hate speech is not tracked nationally, but hate crimes are, giving some indication of the distribution of bias. The National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) reports that during 1998, a total of 7,755 "bias-motivated criminal incidents" were reported to the FBI. To list the major categories, 56 percent were motivated by racial bias, 18 percent by religious bias, and 16 percent by sexual-orientation bias. Nine percent occurred at schools or colleges. Eighty percent of victims were individuals.[2]

There are links between organic brain dysfunction and some neurological dysfunction and violence, said Jack McDevitt, Director of the Center for Criminal Justice Policy Research at Northeastern University and Professor in the College of Criminal Justice. "My assumption would be that they (links) would be there for hate crime. But nobody's looked at that yet that I know of."

Epidemiologists have found an increase in violence when a neighborhood, housing center, or residence hall becomes more diverse, according to McDevitt. The race of the original population and the new group are not a factor. "You start to see violence as a step function as new groups move into" a previously homogeneous area, he said.

"The fastest-growing segment of hate group recruitment and new membership is coming from the 14-24 age group of White, middle class, suburban boys," with recruitment of girls not far behind, said Brian Goldberg, Pacific Northwest Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League in Seattle.

"Certain kids have a tendency to keep committing hate crimes," McLaughlin said, and there are sometimes indicators of hate before kids commit hate crimes. "Forming cliques and ostracizing kids" can be one early warning sign of trouble.

"Hate speech can be a symptom of something much more frighteningly deep. On the other hand, sometimes with little kids it's a mimic of something they don't totally understand. It's something that therefore needs to be jumped on pretty quickly," said Rev. Stanley L. Davis Jr., Executive Director of the Chicago and Northern Illinois Region of the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ, formerly the National Conference of Christians and Jews). Sometimes, for example, when other students hear African American children calling one another "nigger," they may use the term without understanding that it is hate speech. "You try to say that none of this is appropriate at any time."

Children first learn hate at home, but parents who utter racist speech at home may still come to their children's

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FIGHTING HATE: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

school and say that their kids are not prejudiced. "Usually the most effective way of dealing with it is to concentrate on the behavior of students," McLaughlin said, and not on the family. The way to approach the situation with parents, and administrators who may resist dealing with hate speech, is to talk about the impact of hate.

Organized Groups

McLaughlin said that one study indicates that only 5 to 10 percent of hate crimes had been committed by members of organized hate groups. However, organized hate groups have "an enormously disproportionate impact," McLaughlin said, as they grab national attention and spread their message.

The influence of organized groups also spreads as individuals inspired by them act alone under the doctrine of "leaderless resistance" in response to lawsuits against hate groups.

Kids are recruited, in part, because they can use the Internet. Children "are young and impressionable, and they have skills that the hate groups are looking for," Goldberg said. The groups also seek the disenfranchised, loners, and people on the outside, "the same kind of kids that cults recruit."

EVEN BEFORE WE START TEACHING KIDS TO THINK CRITICALLY, WE MUST TEACH AT A VERY EARLY AGE THAT BEING DIFFERENT IS NOT BAD.

Web Recruitment

Jim Carnes, Director of the Teaching Tolerance project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, said that tracking hate groups increasingly means following their activity on the Web. "The Web has really changed the landscape for people who promote ideologies of hate." Groups that once operated obscurely, handing out flyers in grocery store parking lots, now have their material on the Internet. While there are some recruitment efforts directly in schools, Carnes said, they are "scattered and not widespread."

Groups do not immediately recruit kids to carry out hate activities. Instead, they approach them and say, "Aren't you proud of being White? Why do we have Black history month? Why do we have Jewish studies?" said Goldberg, "Where is the White, Northern European, Christian month?" Then groups reinforce that message on hate Web sites aimed at children as young as elementary school and in chat rooms. "It's like the gang mentality or the cult mentality, where you have a group of people that you can associate with."

"Adolescents are at a stage in their lives when they're questioning a lot of things. They are picking and choosing among views and opinions … (and) are trying to figure out," Carnes said, "what kind of adult they are going to be. If you mix that with the natural teenage rebellion stage and add the ingredient of hate, packaged hate, in the form of these Web sites or White Supremacist Rock, or even rap music based on hateful ideology … then that's a dangerous combination."

Response

"We always have to remember and always keep in perspective the fact that this is protected speech, protected by the First Amendment (guarantees of) freedom of speech," Goldberg said. "The ADL is not trying to weaken the protection of free speech. Having said that, the Constitution and the Supreme Court have carved out areas of speech that are not free." Jim Carnes agreed, adding, "Our legal position has been that that right stops at hurting others."

"The best way to respond is with more speech, not less," Goldberg said. "When parents come across extremist speech or hate speech, particularly on the Internet, it's very important they talk to their children about it." Parents must not ignore hate. "If you do that, you let it fester, and you let it grow."

Restricting the flow of ideas sends the wrong message to youth, Goldberg said, and dictating how someone is supposed to think "leads to fascism. We need to do a much better job of teaching them how to become critical thinkers." But even before we start teaching kids to think critically, we must teach at a very early age that being different is not bad. *Raising Children for an Inclusive Tomorrow* introduces children—kindergarten through third grade—to different cultures. It "tries to teach the social skills required to manage issues that are inherent in a diverse environment," Davis said. Elementary students from schools across Chicago visit each other, work together on projects, and learn about each other's cultures. "Little kids rarely see people different than they are, particularly in the city, particularly in impoverished neighborhoods," Davis said. "One of the most telling things is they want to touch each other's hair. They have never seen hair that is different."

Before an Incident

Schools should work to strengthen their communities and have an explicit policy of respect for all people. Such a policy is a "touchstone to which people can refer when anything comes up," Carnes said.

"Teachers and administrators need to model" tolerance, McLaughlin said, while students can be taught how to deescalate a situation without being threatened themselves.

Teachers should remember that when they give an assignment, students will use the Internet for research, Goldberg said. "Type in Martin Luther King Jr. on any search engine and you'll get the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Atlanta … But you'll also get hate sites." Teachers need to be prepared to speak to their kids when they come to them and say, "look what I found," Goldberg said. (The ADL offers a hate-site-screening program for computers.)

Trends in Hate Groups

The older generation of hate groups,

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YOUTH SUMMITS GIVE STUDENTS A VOICE

When faced with hate and intolerance, young people—particularly teenagers—often receive two forms of help from adults: advice on how to defuse situations on their own; and resources they can call on, such as the police, who can deal with perpetrators.

Less often, students are shown a third way: how they, as citizens, can participate in the larger community by discussing, deliberating, and acting on these issues. Youth summits are one promising strategy for enabling young people to respond as citizens to hate crimes, bias, and other sources of violence.

Across the United States

Youth summits enable students to work with adult policymakers to address current issues, particularly violence against youth and its causes. Through this state-based program, hundreds of students study focus issues, often develop plans of action for their schools and communities, then share their ideas and recommendations with policymakers at a culminating "summit." Youth for Justice, a nationally coordinated law-related education program funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) of the U.S. Department of Justice, has sponsored and supported youth summits in virtually every state since 1995.

According to Paula Nessel and Hannah Leiterman of the American Bar Association: "By involving young people in solving the problem of youth violence rather than imposing a 'treatment' on them, youth summits have a real impact on young people's behavior by showing them how they can be part of the solution. Youth summits also instill in young people a sense of their own responsibility for developing and participating in solutions to the challenges facing their communities."

Youth Summits and School Violence After Columbine

Not surprisingly, many summits in 1999-2000 focused on school violence and how student perspectives could be incorporated in policies directly affecting youth. In Oregon, for example, delegates representing more than 500 students at 15 junior and senior high schools met in Portland to determine how to allocate scarce public resources and to discuss the paramount concern for students' safety. Students took part in simulated school board meetings, where they questioned state legislators, school board members, school safety experts, educators, children's advocates, and other civic leaders, then presented their own perspectives and recommendations to policymakers.

In Arizona, 200 fifth-graders from nine schools spent nearly six months researching school violence and developing prevention plans, which they discussed with more than 40 community members. After their summit, students from Erie Elementary School in Chandler took their plan for a peer mediation program to the school management team, which approved peer mediation training for students. "My kids are thrilled and feel like they have made a difference," said teacher Ginny Kurtz.

The 2000 Illinois Youth Summit

The Illinois Youth Summit is an extended program of classroom study, policy analysis, and community service conducted by the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago. In academic year 1999-2000, the Student Advisory Committee—with representatives from 21 participating Chicago, suburban, and rural high schools—chose intolerance as one of the causes of violence they wanted to address. Nearly 1,000 students participated statewide.

In participating classrooms, students began by conducting a survey to determine the sources of intolerance among their peers. With more than 900 respondents, 33 percent identified intolerance in the family, 29 percent reported lack of positive interaction with others, 15 percent stressed pressure from friends to stay in one group, 9 percent said lack of education, and 9 percent said stereotyping in the media. The influence of these factors was apparent when students identified the biggest problems of intolerance at their schools: 56 percent identified "cliques" as the number one problem.

Students then analyzed a current policy, the President's Initiative on Race, to explore how government was responding to intolerance in the larger society. According to the presurvey, 66 percent of all students surveyed thought the initiative was a good way to overcome intolerance in the United States. "I think the President's Initiative on Race is a good idea because I think we should try, at least make an effort to bring people together to talk about race openly," said Jennifer of Senn High School, one of the most diverse campuses in Chicago. Not everyone saw it that way. "You can't get a Black Panther and KKK in a room and expect people to talk about their differences and come out hugging and stuff like that," said Marcus, another student at Senn. Added Gregory, "That one thing will never stop racism, it's gonna be around forever and ever."

Action Through Service

Illinois students did more than just study and discuss the issues in class. They also designed and conducted service projects addressing one of the summit's focus issues. More than half the classes developed projects responding to intolerance and its devastating effects on the school community. At Farragut Career Academy in Chicago, students developed and implemented a conference, Race, History, and You, that featured alternative histories from eth-

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GUEST COLUMN

By NISAN CHAVKIN

NISAN CHAVKIN

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GUEST COLUMN: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

nic, racial, and religious minority viewpoints.

Students at two other schools developed special teach-ins on the issue. The Mother Guerin High School Open Forum in suburban River Grove welcomed all students who wanted to offer insight and opinions about the topic, particularly cliques. Many students had never before been part of an open forum but believed that it allowed them an arena for discussion outside the classroom. At St. Ignatius College Prep in Chicago, a student-developed survey revealed that 95 percent of responding students admitted that they witnessed intolerance regularly in the school. Unity Week began what students hoped would become an annual event.

At suburban Downers Grove North High School, students presented a public performance of "Bang Bang You're Dead," a play by William Mastrosimone that dramatizes the story of a young man coming to terms with the consequences of a shooting in his school.

After conducting a poll of 500 students at the school, students at Senn wrote and performed two short plays of their own that focused on the issues of intolerance toward sexual orientation and clothing style among their peers. "A lot of people in our school are being discriminated against because of the way they look, the way they dress, the people they hang around, basically their appearance and because they don't really fit into the group," said Veronica, a Senn student. "We came up with those two topics, two issues because we did a survey and the survey just basically showed that our school ... the main problem of intolerance in our school was sexual orientation and style."

"I think at school we come to learn about math and science, overall we don't just learn about that," added Marcus. "We learn about how to be people because you go to school with more than 1,000 different people."

Talking With Policymakers

As with other summits around the country, delegates to the culminating Illinois Youth Summit shared their experiences and recommendations with state and federal policymakers. "What attracted me to this project was it's unique and different," said Tremaine, a student at suburban Streamwood High School. "I've never seen it done before."

At the summit, delegates discussed with policymakers what government can and should be doing about these issues and to share what they have done to address these problems themselves.

"I think politicians especially think of youth as being troublesome and negative and that they don't do anything for their community and school," said Maria, a student at Senn. "[The summit] was a way to show that we are trying to do something to better school relations."

The students found an appreciative audience in Illinois Congressman and House Judiciary Chairman Henry Hyde. "The youth summit students have the benefit of focus on real-life problems within the framework of the law," said Hyde, who, along with Illinois Representatives Jan Schakowsky, Judy Biggert, and OJJDP Administrator John Q. Wilson, discussed the issues with students via video-teleconference. "It gets them thinking and interacting and that is all to the good," Hyde said.

"I was very interested in hearing what the participants in the Youth Summit had to say," said Lieutenant Governor Corinne Wood. "This event was important because it reminds us that young Americans must make their views known in the political process, and that their voices are vital to that process. It was also important because it gave us an opportunity to emphasize that combating intolerance is something that we must focus upon anew in each generation."

Wood joined the students in Chicago along with other representatives from Illinois state government. Through the Illinois Youth Summit, students began to realize the power they had as citizens to respond to intolerance and hatred, and to shape and contribute to the larger society around them. "If we can do things like this," said Armando, a student at Farragut, "imagine what else we can do."

Nisan Chavkin is the Associate Director of the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago. He serves on the Coordinating Committee of Youth for Justice and is a member of the NRCSS Advisory Board.

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COLUMNISTS NEEDED

The Safety Zone publishes guest columns dealing with school safety and a "student voice" column. While we cannot pay for articles, we do provide contributors with copies. If you are interested in contributing, please contact the editor by e-mail at safetyzoneeditor@nwrel.org, or call 1-800-268-2275.

RESOURCES

For more information about Youth for Justice Youth Summits, see www.abanet.org/publiced/youth/tab18.html

For lessons and resources from Youth for Justice on school violence, see "Youth Summits," www.crfc.org/yfjsummit.html

For information about the 2000 Illinois Youth Summit, see www.crfc.org/summit2000.html.

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STUDENT COLUMN

By ZACK MOORE

STUDENT VOICES: HELPFUL INSULTS

I can tell you the very minute my life changed forever. I'm a high school senior from Conyers, Georgia. On May 20, 1999, life became more real and a whole lot more complicated. A fellow student walked into my school, Heritage High School, and fired several shots into the crowded commons area. Six students were injured.

Life changed. Panic set in first, and the realization didn't hit me until the next day. When it did, I went through a range of emotions. Rage, anger, fear, guilt, sadness, and confusion were some of the emotions I remember, but I'm positive that I experienced many, many more. Confusion is what I remember the most. I kept asking why: Why did this happen? Why here and why now?

Most of my questions are still unanswered. Some people try to figure out these questions, but I'm not willing to accept many of their answers. Not yet at least. May 20 happened. Life goes on.

During that summer I noticed how strangers would react if they found out I went to "that high school." Almost everyone was sympathetic and full of questions. They wanted to know the "inside story," but most were either too shy or too polite to ask. Most people felt sorry for Heritage High students.

Months passed, and school started again the next fall as scheduled. Everything was pretty much back to normal (except for the occasional news satellite vans parked near the school). Heritage had recovered and moved on; however, we didn't forget what we learned. We were about to learn yet another lesson the hard way.

One day in homeroom we received a letter from the school superintendent. It told us our local PBS station in Atlanta was going to air a documentary about our county's teens. The documentary was entitled "The Lost Children of Rockdale County." It first aired on a Tuesday and was re-aired on Thursday of the same week. It showed the causes and effects of unprotected sex, lack of parental control, and an outbreak of syphilis. Rockdale teens joked about it. "That's nothing like us!" We thought it made the entire county look awful. Personally, I didn't really think people would take it that seriously. I was wrong, as was the rest of the county who mockingly shrugged it off.

At the next Heritage football game following the airing of the program, we realized how other people felt about us. The other team's players cussed at the football players on the field. The cheerleaders were laughed at. The band was yelled at during their half-time show, especially the flag corps, who were taunted by fans yelling, "STDs! STDs! STDs!" It was unbelievable. I couldn't wear my letter jacket outside the county because total strangers would insult me. Everywhere we went, we were the teenagers with syphilis. But not only were we picked on for the documentary, people made gestures with their fingers in the shape of a gun. We were now made fun of because we were the school "that shot each other up." I asked, how could a documentary on sexual activity lead to insults about school violence?

I believe that when the shooting happened, it made only one student look bad. The documentary made the entire county look bad. I was outraged at the documentary and at PBS for airing it. It was a slap in the face for the county and for Heritage and felt like salt in a healing wound. PBS said that it was seen by two million people nationwide, and claimed that five million more needed to see it. They claim that it is a wake-up call for the nation on what is going on with teens across America.

PBS's intentions were good. They wanted to help end unsafe sex and other sexual problems. However, they offended a lot of people.

It is not always possible to tell what will insult a person. Things can annoy some people that wouldn't insult most people. This can be due to religion, race, personal tastes, sexual preferences, or personal history. We cannot look at a person and tell what they've been through in life or how they feel on issues. I suggest we avoid racial slurs and other talk that is traditionally insulting. The best offense is simply to respect other people's opinions. Most often, we must take the defensive approach on insults. If you unintentionally insult someone, talk it out. Explain that it was unintentional, and tell how you'll try and avoid doing it again. Only make promises if you plan on following through. Lies only complicate matters. However, often we find ourselves on the receiving end of "helpful insults."

If insulted, we have three options. First, we can accept it and let it get to us. Second, we can not let it get to us. Third, we can try and stop the insults. The first will tear at us from the inside and make us miserable. If it is apparent that the insults bother us, we will probably be in a bad mood or constantly angry. If we hide it, we are holding in a lot of feelings and emotions. That can be dangerous, as we can suddenly release all that anger at once in a violent matter. This can be by hitting a wall, yelling at somebody, getting into a fight, or even an act of violence involving a weapon. Most of us don't think we are capable of doing something as bad as an act of school violence; however, when we are extremely angry, we don't always think straight. Holding emotions inside is not good for us mentally or physically. We may not be able to see how insults hurt, but they do hurt us in our subconscious. Instead of holding in emotions, we should discuss them with a friend, parent, or other trusted adult. It's perfectly normal and healthy to cry, be angry, and have fear.

The second option—not letting it get to us—doesn't apply to most of us. I don't think anyone can say insults don't truly hurt. We may feel we have control over

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"EVERYWHERE WE WENT, WE WERE THE TEENAGERS WITH SYPHILIS. BUT NOT ONLY WERE WE PICKED ON FOR THE DOCUMENTARY, PEOPLE MADE GESTURES WITH THEIR FINGERS IN THE SHAPE OF A GUN. HOW COULD A DOCUMENTARY ON SEXUAL ACTIVITY LEAD TO INSULTS ABOUT SCHOOL VIOLENCE?"

STUDENT COLUMN: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

the situation when we do not.

I prefer the third option: Fight it. But don't fight fire with fire. That only makes more fire, and that doesn't help. Here's how I dealt with PBS and the "Lost Children" program.

I watched the program and tried to realize what PBS was saying. I tried to only deal with the facts. Opinions are just opinions. There is no way someone can win a debate with opinions. Only the facts can win. I went to the Internet and tried to post my message on the PBS Web site. They refused to post my message on the negative effects of their program. I sent two letters to the producers of the show and to the directors of PBS. They have yet to respond. A friend and I also attended a taped meeting at PBS studios and spoke out. Our three minutes of time was not enough. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* was there, and we were interviewed a week later for a Sunday story.

So, what should we do when another person insults us? Go to the source. Tell the individual to stop. Speaking to the person will show him you're serious and that he's getting to you. People could be doing it just to be funny and don't realize they are actually insulting. Bullies are an important part of the insult picture. Sometimes the only reason someone picks on another person is to get a reaction. Don't give bullies the benefit of getting a reaction. Also, talk to friends, family members, or other adults about bullies, and get their advice. If going to the source doesn't help, go above the source—to a boss, teacher, principal, or religious leader, depending who the bully is. Tell someone, and the insults will stop.

"Helpful insults" are not healthy for people on the giving end or, especially, on the receiving end. True, they are often impossible to avoid, but it is what we do afterwards that makes all the difference. Most acts of school violence occurred when the attacker or attackers were insulted either intentionally or unintentionally. I feel that if those students had been talked to, some of those acts would not have occurred. Communication is the key to school violence. Communication can stop violence, but communication can also cause violence. So please, watch what you say. It can make all the difference.

Zach Moore, 17, is a Heritage High School senior from Conyers, Georgia. He helped found Summit of Schools (SOS) in February 2000 in Littleton, Colorado, to help prevent and react to school violence.

CHERI BROWN, DIRECTOR OF THE HEALING SPECIES PROGRAM OF SOUTH CAROLINA, ADDRESSES PARTICIPANTS AT THE SOUTHEAST REGIONAL TRAINING HOSTED BY NRCSS.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Case Study Subjects Needed

The National Resource Center for Safe Schools seeks schools or school districts interested in being the subject of case studies looking at the successful implementation of school safety programs. NRCSS prefers schools that are grantees under the Safe Schools, Healthy Students Initiative.

A case study will describe—numerically and in narrative—the situation at the school before its safe school program and after the program has been in operation for two years or more. Contact NRCSS director, Carlos Sundermann by e-mail at sundermannc@nwrel.org, or call 1-800-268-2275.

National Network on School Safety

Twenty-five school safety leaders from 15 states met June 29-30 in Charleston, South Carolina. A representative of the Hamilton Fish Institute and OJJDP Program Officer Amalia Cuervo attended, as did five NRCSS staff members. The session was co-sponsored by NRCSS and the South Carolina Department of Education. In addition to state presentations, the meeting heard from Calvin Jackson, Assistant Superintendent of Education, South Carolina Department of Education, and Bill Modzeleski, Director, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, U.S. Department of Education. The meeting continued organizing the network of national leaders working in school safety that was begun at their November 1999 meeting hosted by NRCSS in Portland.

Southeast Regional Training

NRCSS conducted its second regional safe schools training conference in Charleston, South Carolina, June 26-27. The Southeast Regional Safe Schools Conference provided workshops and speakers from federal, state, and local programs to participants from the six-state region of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Alabama. More than 200 school and community representatives attended. Speakers included Dr. David Osher, Director of the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice, and Kathleen Severens, Director, Office of Community Dispute Resolution, U.S. Department of Justice. **[See calendar on Page 8 for details of the third regional training, October 23-24, 2000.]**

Multidistrict Training

NRCSS conducted its first multidistrict training following the Southeast Regional Safe Schools Conference in June. In collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Education, NRCSS identified six school districts that put together a school-and-community-based team. Teams attended a three-day training on the NRCSS curriculum, Creating Safe Schools: A Comprehensive Approach.

FIGHTING HATE: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

such as the Ku Klux Klan, had a well-earned image as uneducated thugs. Today, the leaders of the major groups are often highly educated with advanced degrees, Goldberg said. The more established groups also have a pseudo-religion or ideology behind them and "believe they are on a mission." The street thugs of this generation are largely in the racist skinhead groups, called hammer skins.

Respond to Hate Quickly

The Southern Poverty Law Center's *Responding to Hate at School* is a preparation and response guide. As they developed the book, the staff talked to teachers and administrators nationally who had faced incidents in their schools or communities.[3]

"By far the most common mistake that school leaders reported to us was postponement of response," Carnes said. Wishful thinking leads them to say, "this is an isolated incident, and talking about it is only going to spread fear and misunderstanding."

"It doesn't work, it creates more problems," said Carnes. "Get something out immediately." He recommends an initial statement saying an incident has occurred and the administration is investigating and will report the next day. Include a denunciation of the incident and be sure to follow up with regular messages. If schools can identify the hate group that is targeting them, they should start an education campaign with students.

Administrators need to document the incident and the evidence as thoroughly as possible, while preserving evidence for law enforcement officials. They should photograph any graffiti or other vandalism and write a report as soon as possible.

"If schools wait to address incidents as they come up they're missing a great opportunity for both education and prevention," Carnes said. The law center advocates an explicit policy of respect for all members of the community and active response to any developing problems. "When slurs come up in the hallway, when graffiti show up on the wall, when someone threatens another person," he added, it provides an opportunity to remind everyone "that this is not who we are, and use (the incident) as a tool for moving forward."

RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS

A World of Difference Institute
Contact regional offices of Anti-Defamation League. Web: www.adl.org/frames/front_awod.html

Anti-Defamation League
823 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017
Phone: (212) 490-2525
Web: www.adl.org/default.htm
Regional offices listed on Web page at: www.adl.org/frames/front_regional.html

Facing History and Ourselves
16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA 02146
Phone: (617) 232-1595
Web: www.facing.org

Hands Across Campus
Jeffrey Weintraub, Director
Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Center for American Pluralism
The American Jewish Committee
1156 15th Street, NW #1201
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 785-4200
Fax: (202) 785-4115
Web: www.ajc.org

HateWatch
Web: www.hatewatch.org
Web-based resource to combat online bigotry. Click on "Online Bigotry" and then on "Symbols of Hate" for catalog of hate groups.

National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ)
475 Park Avenue South, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10016-6901
Phone: (212) 545-1300
Regional Offices listed at: www.nccj.org/nccj3.nsf/htmlmedia/organize.html

National Center for Hate Crimes Prevention
Educational Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02158-1060
Phone: 1-800-225-4276
Fax: (617) 244-3436

Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36104
The center cannot handle a large volume of calls. Contact by fax or online.
Fax: (334) 264-3121
Web: www.splcenter.org/centerinfo

Student Civil Rights Teams
Student Civil Rights Teams train students to respond to hate crimes and hate speech and work to prevent violence. The Massachusetts program is featured in *Promising Practices Against Hate Crimes: Five State and Local Demonstrations Projects*, published by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Available online: www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/bja/181425.pdf.

1 Bureau of Justice Assistance. (1997). *A policymaker's guide to hate crimes* [Monograph]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Retrieved September 8, 2000 from the World Wide Web: www.usinfo.state.gov/usa/race/bjahate.html

2 National Criminal Justice Reference Service. (2000). *Hate crime resources: Facts & figures.* Rockville, MD: Author. Retrieved September 8, 2000 from the World Wide Web: www.ncjrs.org/hate_crimes/facts.html

3 Carnes, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Responding to hate at school: A guide for teachers, counselors, and administrators.* Montgomery, AL: Teaching Tolerance. Retrieved September 8, 2000 from the World Wide Web: www.splcenter.org/pdf/rthas.pdf

4 McLaughlin, K.A., & Brilliant, K.J. (1997). *Healing the hate: A national bias crime prevention curriculum for middle schools.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 412 303)

CALENDAR

October 2-4

Improving America's Schools: The U.S. Department of Education's 7th Annual Regional Conference, Louisville, KY. Participants will learn more about how to coordinate federal programs, integrate federal programs with state and local efforts, access the department's technical assistance network, and use resources to implement comprehensive school reform. Participants will have a better understanding of the department's priorities and initiatives, the latest research and data, and funding opportunities. Web: www.ncbe.gwu.edu/iasconferences/. Phone: 1-800-203-549. E-mail: ias_conference@ed.gov.

October 23-24

Western Regional Safe Schools Conference, Reno Hilton, Reno, Nevada. Sponsors: National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS) and Nevada Department of Education. For educators, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officials from the federal, state, and local levels to exchange information about comprehensive safe school planning and related issues. Intended for participants from the Western region, including district and school administrators, school psychologists and counselors, school safety teams, intervention specialists, district Safe and Drug-Free Schools coordinators, school resource officers, parents, community members, and juvenile justice professionals. A limited number of participants may attend from outside the region, so please register early. Registration fee: $50. Participants will be responsible for their own travel and lodging. To obtain hotel conference rate of $69 (plus tax) per room (double occupancy) for dates between October 22-26, call Reno Hilton by October 1 (1-800- 648-5080), and identify yourself as being with the NRCSS. Contact Linda Higgens, NRCSS, for conference information. Phone: 1-800-268-2275. E-mail: higgensl@nwrel.com. Web: www.safetyzone.org.

November 2-3

Building Safe and Caring Communities, Pacific Basin/U.S. National Crime Prevention Conference, Hawaii Convention Center, Honolulu, HI. Offers 50 workshops and more than 120 presenters from throughout the nation and the state of Hawaii. Breakout workshops will address topics in school violence, workplace violence, crime solutions, and cultural diversity. Day two will include a special youth track designed for middle school youth. Contact: Department of the Attorney General,State of Hawaii, 235 South Beretania Street, Suite 401, Honolulu, HI 96813. Phone: (808) 586-1443. Fax: (808) 586-1373. E-mail: prvnt@hula.net. Web: www.cpja.ag.state.hi.us/ccp/train.shtml#CPC

The Safety Zone

Executive Director, NWREL:

NRCSS Director:

Editor:

Design:

Production:

101 S.W. Main, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

1-800-268-2275
(503) 275-0131
Fax (503) 275-0444

E-mail: safeschools@nwrel.org
Web: www.safetyzone.org

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NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204

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OJJDP

OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

NEW REPORTS HELP SCHOOLS ASSESS THREATS

Two reports released this fall by federal agencies offer help for schools in assessing threats, but both the FBI and the Secret Service caution against using their research to profile students as potentially violent.

The FBI report, *The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective*, was released in September after a comprehensive two-year study examining actual incidents of school violence. The study outlines a model procedure for threat assessment and intervention. FBI Director Louis Freeh stressed that the report is "aimed at prevention: identifying the precursors of violence through threat assessments, then initiating an intervention process to stop violent acts before they erupt."

The U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center collaborated with the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute of Justice to produce *Safe School Initiative: An Interim Report on the Prevention of Targeted Violence in Schools*. Released in October, the report uses the Secret Service's experience in assessing threats to the U.S. President and other national leaders to analyze the behavior and thinking of individuals involved in school shootings. The research should give school personnel hope "that much targeted violence is potentially preventable," said Secret Service Director Brian Stafford, "if thoughtful persons work together in a systematic and reasonable way."

Carlos Sundermann, Director of the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS), said that principals and other school personnel "would be wise to take a look at these two studies."

"Both of these reports provide educators with useful information in formulating threat assessment procedures as well as the important considerations when dealing with the problem of violent youth," he said.

While the safety and security of schools needs to be a concern for everyone, Sundermann cautioned, "we must approach prevention of school violence from a comprehensive and supportive framework rather than allowing ourselves to become so punitive and reactionary that we destroy any semblance of positive school climate."

JUSTIN SCHNEPP, 14, ENTERS A HEARING IN MAY ON A CHARGE OF PLOTTING A MASSACRE AT A MICHIGAN MIDDLE SCHOOL. (AP PHOTO/ DETROIT FREE PRESS, MARY SCHROEDER)

FBI Findings

The FBI report cautions that trying to draw up a profile of potentially violent students "can be shortsighted, even dangerous," by unfairly labeling students who exhibit warning signs but who may never actually commit acts of violence. With that caveat, the report points out that "the path toward violence is an evolutionary one, with signposts along the way. A threat is one observable behavior; others may be brooding about frustration or disappointment, fantasies of destruction or revenge, in conversations, writings, drawings, and other actions."

The School Shooter classifies four categories of threats to which school personnel may need to respond:

- *A direct threat* identifies a specific act against a specific target, delivered in a clear and explicit manner (such as, "I am going to place a bomb in the school gym")
- *An indirect threat* tends to be vague, unclear, and

Please see REPORTS, Page 2

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REPORTS: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ambiguous (such as, "If I wanted to, I could kill everyone at this school")
• *A veiled threat* strongly implies but does not explicitly threaten violence (such as, "We would be better off without you around anymore")
• *A conditional threat* warns that a violent act will happen unless certain demands are met (such as, "If you don't pay me a million dollars, I will place a bomb at the school")
The FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) has found that the more direct and detailed a threat, the more serious the risk of it being acted on. The highest level of threat—which is typically direct, specific, and plausible—almost always requires immediate intervention by law enforcement.
In evaluating the seriousness of a threat by a student, the FBI recommends considering all aspects of the student's life, including these four areas highlighted in the assessment model presented in the report:
• **Personality of the student**—Does the student demonstrate resiliency? How does the student respond to rules or authority figures? Does the student express anger or rage, humiliation, sadness, or similar feelings?
• **Family dynamics**—What are the patterns of behavior, thinking, beliefs, and values within the student's family?
• **School dynamics**—What is the culture of the school, and how does the student see himself or herself fitting into—or failing to fit into—that culture?
• **Social dynamics**—Who are the student's friends? Do they share attitudes toward drugs, alcohol, and weapons?
The FBI report concludes with guidelines for responding to threats within the school community and outlines the role of law enforcement in threat assessment and response.
The report is available online (www.fbi.gov/library/school/school2.pdf).

SECRET SERVICE FINDINGS

Safe School Initiative points out that acts of "targeted violence" are extremely rare in U.S. schools. Even though such acts—in which a known attacker selects a particular target for attack—occur infrequently, they have a "tremendous impact" on the school, the surrounding community, and the rest of the nation, the report asserts.
In the early 1990s, the Secret Service began studying persons known to have attacked a prominent public leader during the past half-century in order to develop a more systematic way of thinking about threat assessment. The same kind of systematic approach has been taken in this report, with the goal of better understanding—and ultimately preventing—targeted violence in school.
After studying 37 incidents of targeted school violence, the Secret Service has found:
• Such incidents are rarely impulsive; rather, they are most often planned and, in half the cases, had revenge as a motive
• In more than three-quarters of the cases, the attacker told someone about the attack in advance; usually, the person told was a peer
• There is no useful profile of "the school shooter"
• Most attackers had previously used guns and had access to them
• Most shooting incidents were not resolved by law enforcement intervention
• Nearly half the cases involved students who influenced or encouraged the attacker
• Many attackers reported they had been bullied or felt persecuted
• Most attackers engaged in some behavior, prior to the incident, that caused others concern or indicated a need for help
The interim report is available online (www.treas.gov/usss/ntac).

THREAT ASSESSMENT FACT SHEET AVAILABLE

In the aftermath of a violent incident, "too often we can look back and identify clues" that might have preceded the event, acknowledges Karen Franklin, State School Safety Coordinator with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA). To help schools that are examining how they can handle student threats before they escalate into violence, Franklin has written a fact sheet, *Effective Threat Management*, recently published by the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS).
The fact sheet offers a step-by-step approach to managing threats in a way designed to prevent violence.
Schools and districts need to develop a policy to address student threats and to broadcast the message that "threats will not be tolerated," Franklin advises. Forming a multidisciplinary threat management team is one of the best prevention approaches a school can take, Franklin reports.
Effective Threat Management includes a list of suggestions for ways schools can respond to student threats, ranging from meeting with parents and teachers to intervention and treatment for the student.
To obtain a free copy of *Fact Sheet No. 7: Effective Threat Management*, call the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (1-800-268-2275), or check on the NRCSS Web site (www.safetyzone.org).

WHEN DEATH AFFECTS YOUR SCHOOL

Twenty years of working as a school psychologist and serving on national crisis-response teams have taught me many lessons. I know that deaths rarely occur at school, but I also know that school communities must be prepared to cope with losses. According to the Centers for Disease Control, annual death rates in the United States include:

- 1 in 1,200 high school students
- 1 in 3,000 middle school students
- 1 in 4,000 elementary school students

Figures are not available on other deaths that certainly affect school communities, such as the death of a faculty member or a parent.

Unfortunately, educators have had much practice in managing emotionality after a death. Several key points have been learned, including:

- Do not underestimate the impact of the death
- The more quickly emotional assistance is offered, the better the adjustment
- Faculty processing should be first and mandatory
- Schedule a meeting for parents
- Share as many facts as possible
- Provide opportunities for students and faculty to talk about their emotions
- Recognize there are long-term implications
- Do not hesitate to set aside the curriculum and postpone tests

The first step to take when a death occurs is to verify the facts. School administrators should contact acceptable sources such as the police and a close family member (deceased child's parents or faculty member's spouse) for verification. The administrator should then utilize the school calling tree to notify all faculty members. This is important to provide faculty members the opportunity to process their own issues with regard to crisis and loss, to have the opportunity to seek outside support, and to schedule a faculty meeting before school convenes. If verification of the death occurs while school is in session, then the administrator should write a memo to be hand-delivered to each faculty member.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Administrators set the tone and should honestly acknowledge their own emotions and advocate that all concerned have the opportunity to express their emotions through talking, writing, artwork, projects, ceremonies, and rituals. In one instance, an administrator apologized for her tears as she was announcing the death of the third faculty member during that school year. There was no need to apologize, and her willingness to let her emotions show actually helped everyone. Another administrator told me that he knew we were a national crisis team, but because counselors had assisted everyone the first morning after the deaths at his school, he assumed that everyone would be just fine. Underestimating the impact of the deaths, he had to be convinced to call a faculty meeting. At the conclusion of an emotional session, the administrator publicly stated that he had been wrong in his failure to recognize the important need for the faculty to process. A year later, several of the teachers reported that the faculty processing session helped everyone understand that they were not alone in their emotionality, and the initial meeting set the tone for weekly follow-up meetings. Too often, meetings held for faculty only deal with logistical issues and do not allow venting of emotions.

If possible, interventions should begin with the faculty and parents. These two groups are in the best position to assist children. Children's most common reactions to a crisis are:

- Fear of the future
- Regression academically and behaviorally
- Nightmares and sleeping difficulties

These reactions are not commonly known or understood by adults. Meetings for both faculty and parents can provide an opportunity to outline in a practical manner what reactions to expect from children and how to assist them. The more assistance that faculty and parents receive after a death, the more help they are able to give children.

These questions may help estimate the degree of trauma after a death:

- Who was the deceased person? The death of a popular or well-known member of the school community will have more impact than that of a new or little-known member.
- What happened to the deceased? Murder and suicide are unexpected and more difficult to deal with than a death by natural causes or disease.
- Where did the death occur? Deaths that occur on school grounds are very unexpected and difficult to deal with. Local and national media may become involved. Many school community members may be apprehensive about returning to school. However, it is important to reopen school as quickly as possible because school provides the one place that is easiest to deliver mental health assistance to all concerned, and it is the only place in many communities where everyone can be together.
- Have any prior occurrences had an impact on the school? The recent death may bring up unresolved issues from other crisis situations.
- Who was the perpetrator? Dealing with the recent series of school shootings committed by students has been difficult because it is shocking when an acquaintance commits an act of violence.

USING OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE

Schools should not hesitate to accept outside assistance for several reasons.

Please see GUEST, Page 4

GUEST COLUMN

By SCOTT POLAND

GUEST: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Schools simply do not have many mental health professionals, and those they do have may understandably be affected when someone they know has died. The wise administrator will recognize the need for coordination and partnership with area agencies, mental health personnel, and clergy. National assistance is available in the United States from the American Red Cross, National Organization for Victim Assistance (www.try-nova.org) and the National Emergency Assistance Team [(301) 657-0270, www.naspweb.org].

IS THERE A MODEL?

My most recent book, *Coping With Crisis* (published by Sopris West, 1-800-547-6747, www.sopriswest.com), outlines many practical and age-appropriate strategies to assist children and faculty. It is most important that children be given permission for a range of emotions and the opportunity to express these emotions. The National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) Model of Crisis Intervention proved effective in the aftermath of school shootings. The model, which is extremely applicable to the classroom, recommends that all desks be placed in a circle. One facilitator leads the discussion and a scribe records exact key phrases on the blackboard or an easel. In the NOVA Model, everyone is asked to remember:

- Where were they when they first became aware of the tragedy?
- What were their sensory perceptions?
- What were the accompanying thoughts and feelings?
- What are they worried about in the near future?
- What previously helped them when bad things occurred in their lives, and what or who has provided some comfort now?

This model offers an effective starting point toward recovery. The challenge then becomes how to get ongoing and long-term assistance to all who need it. That is why collaboration with agencies, organizations, and practitioners is so important. Many young people also like to become involved in projects and activities to make a difference. An excellent organization to assist them is Mothers Against Violence in America (1-800-897-7697).

WHAT IF THE DEATH WAS A SUICIDE?

Dealing with suicide is particularly difficult. Important and practical guidelines from the American Association of Suicidology [(202) 237-2280] outline these key points:

- Don't dismiss school or encourage funeral attendance during school hours
- Don't hold a large-scale school assembly or dedicate a memorial to the deceased
- Do provide individual and group counseling
- Verify the facts, and do treat the death as a suicide
- Do contact the family of the deceased
- Do emphasize that no one is to blame for the suicide
- Do emphasize that help is available, that suicide is preventable, and that everyone has a role to play in prevention

DOES NEWS OF TRAGEDIES AFFECT STUDENTS ELSEWHERE?

Most children in America as well as in other countries viewed the extensive and graphic news coverage of the shooting at Columbine and other international disasters. School officials should anticipate the following increases:

- Feelings of fear for safety
- Graphic writing or verbal threats about violence
- Bomb threats
- Rumors of copycat attempts
- The need to talk about what happened
- Weapons brought onto campuses

School principals should:

- Conduct faculty meetings to prepare teachers for discussion of the tragedy with their students
- Make sure discussions are focused on how to make schools safer rather than on glamorizing the perpetrators
- Assign school police, administrators, and teachers to visible points inside and outside the school where they will greet students and assure them of their safety
- Develop a violence prevention and school safety lesson to be utilized in every classroom
- Highlight (for both parents and students) prevention programs that are already in place; if there are no such programs, then a task force on school safety and violence prevention should be formed to develop these programs

Each nationally publicized school shooting dramatically affects our children. Too many educators have insisted on sticking to the assigned curriculum when their students have needed opportunities to discuss their fears. Many teachable moments to work on school safety and violence prevention have been missed. The death of anyone known to the school community cannot be simplified or minimized. Every school should have a plan developed and ready to be utilized after a death, a plan that deals with managing emotionality and that provides assistance to everyone concerned with the grieving process.

Dr. Scott Poland, President-Elect of the National Association of School Psychologists, has led national crisis teams and has written extensively about crisis intervention in the schools. He is Director of the Department of Psychological Services, Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District, Houston, Texas.

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE CHANGES SCHOOL CLIMATE

ELMIRA, Oregon—Fern Ridge Middle School looks like a quiet campus in an even quieter town.

But looks can be deceiving.

Eight years ago, when Susan Taylor-Greene arrived here as Assistant Principal, Fern Ridge was a school in crisis. The administrative staff had been in near-constant flux for several years. After watching new leaders come and go with each school year, teachers were feeling defeated. The rules and programs kept changing. Without clear expectations for their behavior, students had resorted to settling disputes with their fists. Parents didn't trust teachers. Throughout the community, Fern Ridge Middle School had a reputation for trouble. And no wonder. That year, the office received 7,000 disciplinary referrals.

Today, Fern Ridge Middle School is a school where students, teachers, administrators, and parents interact politely and with real purpose. Grades are up. Referrals are way down. As language arts teacher Karen Myers says, "I have seen us move from chaos to community." The school has been honored by the Oregon School Boards Association, applauded by community members, and besieged by curious visitors. Taylor-Greene—now the principal—has shared her school's success story at national education conferences. Two of her staff members were presenters at the Western Regional Safe Schools Conference hosted by the NRCSS in October.

The school's turnaround has taken a long-term effort by teachers, administrators, and experts in behavior management to change the whole school climate. And like a breath of fresh air, the new climate has invigorated all who work and learn here.

Starting With Teamwork

Fed up with chronic disruptions that made learning nearly impossible, five teachers and Taylor-Greene formed a team during the 1993–94 school year to try to save their school. Investing their own money and time, they enrolled in a year-long night class at the University of Oregon. The graduate-level course was taught by Education Professor Rob Horner, co-creator of a schoolwide approach to discipline called Effective Behavior Support. According to research by Horner and his colleague George Sugai, lasting improvements in discipline do not happen by dealing with one student or one class at a time. Instead, these experts advocate making widespread and fundamental changes in how schools function as systems.

In a booklet that describes the lessons learned at Fern Ridge, *The High Five Program, A Positive Approach to School Discipline*, the night class is described as a pivotal experience in the lives of the team members and a turning point for the whole school: "They learned about the value of teamwork and consistent expectations, and teaching students what is expected of them. … Eventually, these staff members would lead the entire staff through the change process."

Taking a realistic look at their school, the team recognized that certain variables were beyond their control. Fern Ridge teaches a challenging population of as many as 575 students. More than 30 percent of the students live in poverty, and more than 20 percent are eligible for special education or Title I programs. When the team members looked more closely at data relating to discipline, however, they began to see where change was possible. Discipline records showed that many students were receiving repeat referrals. "Consequences associated with the referrals were not changing the students' behavior," according to *The High Five Program*. So discipline was where they decided to focus their initial efforts.

The next school year, the ad hoc team added a few new members and gained official status as the School Climate Committee. Realizing that they couldn't change the school by themselves, committee members created opportunities for all staff to learn more about effective behavioral support. Horner came to the school to share his expertise and explain his research-based approach for managing student behavior with positive reinforcement.

"Our program is based on the fact that 85 percent of students have the social skills to do quite well if placed in a reasonable environment," Horner explains in *Inquiry*, a University of Oregon publication. "If an effective school environment can be established, teachers are freed to devote special attention to the students who have larger behavioral problems."

Drawing on the entire staff for ideas and support, the School Climate Committee eventually developed a plan to teach students how to behave in school. The Fern Ridge Middle School High Fives, cornerstone of the school's positive discipline approach, list five specific expectations for student behavior:

- Be respectful
- Be responsible
- Keep hands and feet to self
- Follow adult directions
- Be there—Be ready

These expectations—couched in clear language middle schoolers can understand and remember—apply throughout the school. The expectations are specifically reinforced in the campus locations where referrals have been the heaviest, such as hallways, cafeteria, gym, school bus area, and other high-traffic common areas. And they are uniformly positive. The High Fives tell students what they *can* do, not what they shouldn't. When students behave appropriately they earn rewards, such as tickets that they can redeem for merchandise at a student store.

Please see DISCIPLINE, Page 6

THE SCHOOL'S TURNAROUND DIDN'T HAPPEN BY CHANCE. IT HAS TAKEN A CONCERTED, LONG-TERM EFFORT BY TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND EXPERTS IN BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT TO CHANGE THE WHOLE SCHOOL CLIMATE.

DISCIPLINE: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

The incentives give every student "recognition for doing the right thing," says a seventh-grade girl who used to get suspended regularly for fighting.

Keeping on Track

For students who stray from the High Fives, another program has been put in place to keep them from becoming chronic behavior problems. The Behavioral Education Program helps at-risk students learn problem-solving skills to keep them on track and out of trouble. Instead of issuing disciplinary referrals when students behave inappropriately, staff members work one-to-one with students on a problem-solving process. First, the staff member asks the student to identify which of the High Fives he or she failed to follow and describe how his or her behavior caused a problem. Students are challenged to think of an alternative action that would show responsible behavior. Finally, the staff member asks the student, "Is there anything I can do to help you?"

Students continue to build on their problem-solving skills as they advance from grade to grade. In seventh and eighth grade, students are introduced to more complex conflict resolution skills. Nicknamed the Higher Fives, these five steps are taught as a way for students to avoid and defuse conflict: avoid it; label it; deal with it; accept it; move on. "The Higher Fives are relatively difficult to teach … requiring more abstract thinking," acknowledge the authors of *The High Five Program.*

Teachers have learned some critical lessons, as well. Says Taylor-Greene, "Teachers now feel empowered and realize that, when they have vision and leadership and are given the necessary resources, they can create a school culture that is both safe and supportive for the entire community."

The High Five Program, A Positive Approach to School Discipline, developed by Fern Ridge Middle School's School Climate Committee, was named Oregon's Most Outstanding Curriculum for 1996–97 by the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators. To purchase copies of the program training manual (now in a second edition), or to inquire about other resources, such as consultations or site visits, contact: Fern Ridge Middle School, Fern Ridge School District 28 J, 88831 Territorial Road, Elmira, Oregon 97437. Phone: (541) 935-8230. Fax: (541) 935-8234.

SAFETY RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR LOAN

The following resources are just a few of the titles available for loan from the National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS) lending library. Library materials may be requested by telephone, e-mail, or ordered from our Web site (www.safetyzone.org/library.html) by schools, law enforcement agencies, state and county agencies, and organizations with a verifiable address and phone number.

Individuals may request materials by interlibrary loan through their local library. For further information, contact Resource Librarian Ira Pollack or Resource Specialist Ned Howard (1-800-268-2275).

Measuring Violence-Related Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors Among Youths: A Compendium of Assessment Tools, by Linda L. Dahlberg, Susan B. Toal, and Christopher B. Behrens

This compendium provides researchers and prevention specialists with a set of tools to evaluate programs to prevent youth violence. The compendium contains more than 100 measures, most of which are intended for use with youths between 11 and 20 years, to assess factors such as attitudes toward violence, aggressive behavior, conflict resolution strategies, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and exposure to violence.

Antisocial Behavior in School: Strategies and Best Practices by Hill M. Walker, Geoff Colvin, and Elizabeth Ramsey

This text is intended to provide educators with increased understanding of the nature, origins, and causes of antisocial behavior and to offer information on the best available practices, interventions, and model programs for preventing and remediating antisocial behavior disorders occurring in school.

Solution-Focused Counseling in Middle and High Schools by John J. Murphy

Disruptive classroom behavior, failing grades, truancy, and violence are serious problems for students. Some of the ways in which school counselors can correct school problems in a short period of time are described in this book. Solution-focused counseling works by encouraging students, parents, and teachers to discover and apply their own unique resources and strengths to the problem at hand.

Coping with Crisis: Lessons Learned, A Resource for Schools, Parents, and Communities by Scott Poland and Jami S. McCormick

Drawn from the firsthand experiences of those working in the trenches of crisis intervention, this crisis-response handbook details the steps to take within an hour of an incident as well as in the days, weeks, and months that follow.

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

School Crime Down

School crime continues to decline nationally, according to the third *Annual Report on School Safety*, released in October by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice. In addition to the drop in crime on school campuses by nearly a third between 1992 and 1998, the report found a declining rate of crime against students outside school and a steady and significant decline in the percentage of high school-aged students who reported carrying a weapon to school (7 percent in 1999, down from 12 percent in 1993). The trends were cited as encouraging by Attorney General Janet Reno and Secretary of Education Richard Riley, who wrote in an introductory letter that the report "reminds all of us to take certain key principles to heart—listening to those who work and learn in schools every day; collaborating in new and creative ways; and implementing tailored strategies, focused on prevention, intervention, and accountability."

The *2000 Annual Report* devotes a chapter to the work of the newest Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative grant recipients. These 23 communities are using integrated, comprehensive, communitywide strategies to improve school safety and promote healthy childhood development.

The 75-page *2000 Annual Report on School Safety* can be downloaded from the Department of Education Web site (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS).

In addition, the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) have released the third in an annual series, *Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2000*. The statistical report contains the most recent data from a number of federally funded studies relating to school crime and safety. It can be downloaded from the NCES Web site (nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2001017).

Southwest Conference Planned

The National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS) and the Texas School Safety Center will host a multistate Southwest Regional Safe Schools Conference from January 31 to February 2, 2001, in Austin, Texas.

The regional conference, fourth in a series presented by the NRCSS, will bring together educators, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officials from the federal, state, and local levels. Participants will share information, resources, and ideas about comprehensive safe school planning, effective use of research, access to federal resources, and models of Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs.

Among the featured topics will be:

- Developing and maintaining effective collaborations
- Comprehensive approaches to safe school planning
- Effective truancy and dropout prevention programs
- Implementing conflict resolution programs
- Recognizing and reducing bullying and harassment

The Southwest Regional Safe School Conference will take place at the Holiday Inn in Austin. The registration fee of $50 includes all conference material and breakfast and lunch both days. For registration information, contact Linda Higgens at NRCSS. Phone: 1-800-268-2275, or (503) 275-0131. To reserve rooms at the Holiday Inn at a special conference rate of $80 (plus tax), per room (double-occupancy), call the hotel directly at (512) 448-2444 and identify yourself as being with the National Resource Center for Safe Schools.

Western Conference Encourages Safe School Planning

The NRCSS's third regional safe school training conference, held in Reno, Nevada, on October 23 and 24, drew 180 participants from five Western states. Sponsored in collaboration with the Nevada Department of Education, the Western Regional Safe School Conference offered an opportunity for sharing of information by a wide variety of audiences, including district and school administrators, school psychologists and counselors, school safety teams, intervention specialists, school resource offices, Safe and Drug-Free Schools coordinators, parents, other community members, and juvenile justice professionals.

NRCSS Director Carlos Sundermann explains that the regional approach to training "can have tremendous impact." The Center is collaborating with selected state educational agencies and state school safety centers to bring together educators, parents, law enforcement, juvenile justice, and youth development professionals who need assistance in creating comprehensive safe school plans.

"Participants have told us that they like the comprehensive approach because it allows for team members to select the training topics that will help to strengthen their safe school plans," he said. "Participants also appreciate the resources that NRCSS provides in terms of the research, effective programs and practices, and available funding resources. Participants are provided with opportunities to learn from others in their region who have been successful in improving school climate and culture and reducing and preventing school violence."

ERIC WILLIAMS OF THE SCOTTSDALE (ARIZONA) POLICE DEPARTMENT, DISCUSSED THE ROLE OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS AT THE WESTERN REGIONAL SAFE SCHOOL CONFERENCE.

CALENDAR

January 11–13

Seventh Joint National Conference on Alternatives to Expulsion, Suspension, and Dropping Out of School, Kissimmee, Florida. For information contact Safe Schools Coalition, P.O. Box 1338, Holmes Beach, FL 34218-1338. Phone: 1-800-537-4903. Web: www.ed.mtu/safe/alt-7.htm

January 31–February 2

Southwest Regional Safe Schools Conference, Austin, Texas. Sponsors: National Resource Center for Safe Schools (NRCSS) and Texas School Safety Center. Intended for participants in the Southwest region, including district and school administrators, school psychologists, counselors, school safety teams, intervention specialists, Safe and Drug-Free Schools coordinators, school resource offices, parents, community members, and juvenile justice professionals. Registration fee: $50. Participants will be responsible for their own travel and lodging expenses. To obtain hotel conference rate of $70 plus tax, double occupancy, call Holiday Inn, Austin South, at (512) 448-2444, and identify yourself as being with NRCSS. For conference registration, contact Linda Higgens, NRCSS. Phone: 1-800-268-2275 or (503) 275-0131. E-mail: higgensl@nwrel.org.

March 18–21

National Conference on Juvenile Justice, Reno, Nevada. Sponsors: National District Attorneys Association, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. For information, phone: (703) 549-9222. Register online at www.ndaa.org/conference/conference.html.

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Executive Director/CEO, NWREL:
Dr. Ethel Simon-McWilliams

NRCSS Director:
Carlos Sundermann

Editor:
Ira Pollack

Design:
Renaissance Group Inc.

Production:
Denise Crabtree

101 S.W. Main, Suite 500
Portland, Oregon 97204

1-800-268-2275
(503) 275-0131
Fax (503) 275-0444

E-mail: safeschools@nwrel.org
Web: www.safetyzone.org

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NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR SAFE SCHOOLS
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204

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